The Role of Audience Reception Following the Publication of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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Introduction: The Book With a Life of Its Own

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the story of Jean Louise "Scout" Finch in the summer she began to understand the racial tensions in the town around her. Her narration begins by defining key people such as Jem and Atticus. Jem is Scout's brother and best friend, and from an argument retold by Scout, readers learn a brief history of their ancestry. In the midst of this, her father, Atticus Finch, is introduced as he settles a small squabble between the children. From there, Scout and Jem's story telling introduces Calpurnia, the housekeeper and babysitter, Dill, a neighboring playmate, and the stories of the Boo Radley family.

Blamed for years as the Maycomb scapegoat, Boo Radley is guilty even when someone else is responsible for strange occurrences. Nonetheless, Boo is fascinating to Dill, despite the children never actually seeing Boo. The seasons roll on until Scout is nine, Jem is thirteen and their father agrees to defend a black man in court; a case that no other lawyer in town wanted to touch. Tom Robinson, a black man, faces rape accusations made by Mayella Ewell and her father, Bob. The fallout from this monumental case brings the mysterious Boo Radley out of hiding.

The night before the case was to take place, an angry mob appeared at the jail, hoping to lynch Tom before he has the chance to go to court. Atticus stops the mob, because Tom deserves his day in court. The court case is the talk of the town, and Scout and Jem make sure they are there for it— even when they had to sneak out of the house and sit in the segregated "colored balcony". In court, Atticus

presents a compelling defense and made the jury see that the Ewells (Mayella and her father, Bob) framed Tom. Atticus brought to the forefront the fact that Tom physically could not have hit her as they claim, because he would have had to use his withered left hand. Despite Atticus' plea to the twelve man all-white jury to push past the opinion that all black men are criminals, the jury still finds Tom guilty. Jem and Scout are dumbfounded by the decision. Once in prison, Tom tries to escape and is fatally shot by prison security in his attempt.

Despite the jury verdict, Bob Ewell decides the judge and Atticus have made a fool out of him and seeks revenge for this. He menaces the judge and Tom's widow until finally he attacks Jem and Scout. While walking home at night from the school pageant, Bob comes out of nowhere. Scout was in a large costume and cannot see, so the story is told based on what Scout can hear and briefly feels. Scout is grabbed by an unknown entity, she hears a scream, and holds still until the scuffling around her has stopped. As she walked home, through a hole in her costume she sees a man carrying Jem home. She arrives home to a flurry of activity, and the man who carried Jem home is sitting in the corner of the room. Scout explains her story to Atticus and realizes the man is none other than Boo Radley. She and Boo slip out to the front porch and listen as Atticus and the sheriff discuss the details of how to handle the situation, deciding to rule that Bob fell on his knife, thus protecting Boo's identity and Jem's innocence.

To Kill a Mockingbird was released on July 11, 1960 with reviews beginning to appear just the day before. Critics praised Lee's new voice on the book market for the "gentle affection, rich humor, and deep understanding of small-town family life

in Alabama" (Lyell). Lee was someone "rare" and ads declared "the whole country was singing this mockingbird's praises" (Display Ad 19). In newspapers from New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles selected to represent three different American audiences, the articles reviewing *Mockingbird* focused on the character of Atticus Finch, the court case he represented, and admiration for the newly published author, Harper Lee. Newspaper reviews were becoming more about a novel's profit margins rather than focusing on if it was a good or bad read.

While *Mockingbird* worked its way through newspaper features and bestseller lists, it was also becoming widely read across the United States. It started in book clubs, spread into classrooms, and even became an award-winning film. The book spent six weeks on the bestseller list before it was picked up by Alan Pakula and Robert Mulligan to be adapted for film. Harper Lee was involved with the production of the film, ensuring that the town and characters of *Mockingbird* were carefully selected to be the best representatives of her work, but she chose not to write the screenplay. Around 1990, Lee finally allowed *Mockingbird* to be adapted as a stage play. This stage play is closer in resemblance to the film adaptation than to the original novel, if only because the film mitigates the span of time to reflect a year in the life of the Finches, rather than roughly, three years as the book does.

In education systems, teachers keep *Mockingbird* alive year after year, as they repeat the tradition of teaching the novel as their eighth to tenth grade teachers did. In discussing the lasting impact of *Mockingbird* around its fiftieth anniversary, writer and former teacher, Wally Lamb, author of *She's Come Undone,* states,

> For the kids I think [the characters] became sort of a vehicle by which they could begin to think and sort of process some of these emotional reactions they were having [to racial tensions]. In its own way, *To Kill a Mockingbird* sort of triggers the beginning of change and certainly puts into the stage the questions of racial equality and bigotry in the way Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Toms Cabin* sort of stirred things up. (Murphy, 112)

In Lamb's observations of teaching the novel, students are able to put themselves in the positions of Scout and Jem as they watch the court case unravel and learn along with the main characters of the injustices that would unfold. The moral judgements may not be perfectly aligned with an individual reader's beliefs, but they know what was done was not right. In that same collection of interviews in a book titled, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo,* long time fans of the novel recount their first experience and why the novel remains relevant to them. For many of the interviewed fans, their connection to the novel began when they read it in school. The sentiment for *To Kill a Mockingbird* was not universal across the United States as it was banned in schools at the same time it was adopted into curriculums. Cautious parents school boards individually devised reasons they would not be reading *Mockingbird.* Those against the novel cited Lee's book as being too radical at the time, or inappropriate for children.

The avid fans of *Mockingbird* found a community to express their admiration of the novel with the rise of the Internet. In social media forums, fans share their favorite quotes, fan art, images from the film, and where they have seen reference of *Mockingbird* in popular shows and literature. These communities are able to protect Lee's wishes for the treatment of her text, and direct evidence of this is in fanfiction. Writers and readers of fanfiction remain wary of Lee's second novel, *Go Set a Watchman,* and its relation to *Mockingbird,* as well as how writers choose to write

about either title. Fan writers rarely disrupt the plot of *Mockingbird* as they typically explore the life of Atticus outside of the text and make note of whether or not they accept the effects *Watchman* would have on their text when it is on a timeline consistent with where *Mockingbird* ended.

Left in the crowd of Lee's fans were those who wanted more literature with Lee's name on it. However, for sixty years, fans were in the dark as to the existence of any other fiction by Lee until 2015 when it was announced that *Go Set a Watchman* would be released in July of that year. Initially promoted as a sequel to *Mockingbird, Go Set a Watchman* is a novel about Jean Louise Finch who has just returned to visit her hometown Maycomb, Alabama in the 1950's. Upon arriving from New York, Jean Louise is met by her childhood sweetheart Henry "Hank" Clinton, who works for her father Atticus, a former lawyer and state legislator. The town is sifting through the aftermath of Brown v. Board of Education and the NAACP is on the rise in the South. Atticus' sister Alexandra runs the house after Calpurnia's retirement, and his brother Jack is a role model for Jean Louise. The novel is front loaded with information about Jean Louise's past including how her brother, Jem, and mother both died young and memories of time spent with Jem and Dill Harris. Once Jean returns home, she looks through papers until she finds a racially charged pamphlet in her father's things and secretly follows him to a Citizen's Council meeting. In this meeting, Jean's inner turmoil that carries throughout the book fires up when she discovers her father is a bigot in support of segregation. From this Jean Louise continues to learn through conversations with her father, uncle, and Hank that she needs to separate her conscience from her father. When she finally

understands this, she can see her father as a human being and not as an idol on a pedestal.

As more people got their hands on *Watchman,* it became clear that the novel was not truly the sequel to *Mockingbird.* Information recovered from the original editor, Tay Hohoff, for *Mockingbird* revealed *Watchman* was the first book written by Lee. Hohoff could see that "spark of a true writer flashed in every line" but *Watchman* was "more a series of anecdotes than a fully conceived novel" (Mahler). Loyal fans feared for what may have happened behind the scenes based on their knowledge of Harper Lee in personal and professional realms. Edward Burlingame, executive editor of Lippincott in the late 1960's worked closely with Hohoff and understood the relationship she held with Lee. Of this relationship, Burlingame has said "Tay really guarded Nelle like a junkyard dog. She was not going to allow any commercial pressures or anything else to put stress on her to publish anything that wouldn't make Nelle proud or do justice to her" (Mahler). With a hard won understanding, Lee's editor knew more literature would only come if Lee felt so compelled to write it, independently of societal pressures. At the time of *Watchman*'s release, Harper Lee was in an assisted-living facility and in poor health. Fans cried abuse and worried that *Watchman* would not be true to Lee's writing. Tanya Carter, Harper Lee's lawyer, even went so far as to write an opinion piece for the New York Times describing how she found the manuscript and had Lee's consent to move forward with it. Lee was deemed of sound mind and body despite the allegations, and *Watchman* went forward to print.

Less than a year after the release of *Watchman,* Harper Lee passed away in February of 2016. Internet streams flooded with articles reminiscing and expressing gratitude for Harper Lee's contribution to literature. As many friends and fans expressed their grief, Lee's life was tucked away as quietly as she preferred. In the year following her death, *Mockingbird* saw audiences reflecting on the impact the novel had on them as articles, lectures, and new renditions of the *Mockingbird* stage play came to the surface. In spite of that, the buzz surrounding *To Kill a Mockingbird* would recede into a lull as teachers continue to teach the novel, people re-watch the film, and fans quietly recall the nostalgia they felt when they read *Mockingbird* as a young adult.

The life of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not dependent on the life of its reclusive author. Since its release in July of 1960, Harper Lee remained out of the public eye. The fame of the book was not perpetuated by Lee, but rather by its readers who sought to continually adapt it and express concern for its well-being when threatened by fan texts and *Go Set a Watchman* that altered perception of *Mockingbird.* This history of audience reception ventures to show the impact of devoted fans over the fifty-five plus years since the 1960 release of *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

Chapter 1: The Release of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Within the month of its release in July of 1960, newspaper columnists were reviewing *To Kill a Mockingbird* across the United States. Reviewers threw inviting adjectives into their articles such as "entertaining", "fresh", and "delightful." Critics

were enveloped by the novel's southern charm which brought to life the "town full of individual characters" (Sullivan). However many of these articles failed to capture key figures and plot points central to discussing the novel, in favor of focusing on Atticus Finch rather than the variety of characters and proceeding to commend Harper Lee for her writing skills. Literature critics' approach to reviewing literature leads to the bigger issue of the nature of newspaper reviews transitioning to be more about selling novels rather than evaluating a new novel as good or bad.

In the *New York Times*, critics focused on the presence of Atticus Finch. Columnist Herbert Mitgang wrote in *Books of The Times,* "[Atticus] is one of the most decent members of his profession found in fiction," describing him as a "gentle widower" who "impart[s] a sense of justice to his children" (Mitgang, 1960). Similarly, Frank Lyell labels Atticus as the "embodiment [of] fearless integrity, magnanimity and common sense" (Lyell). Regarded as a morally outstanding defendant and father calm in the face of his opponents, Atticus was the center of attention for Scout and her audience of readers. Scout however gets less of the spotlight from critics. She is written off as a "pixie and minor troublemaker" by Mitgang, and Lyell describes her as "impersonal" and "reflecting in maturity on childhood events of the mid-thirties" but Lyell's reliability is called into question as he incorrectly states that her name is Jean Marie and that she is eight years old at the end of the novel (Lyell). Scout, by the critic's judgment, is considerably less important despite the fact that she is the story's narrator. Instead, critics revert to discussing how "Harper Lee turns a reader's thoughts…" (Mitgang) or that Lee's "gay, impulsive approach" (Lyell) is in opposition to Scout's expository style. Critics

are eager to separate Lee from Scout in a way that discredits the young narrator and makes Lee a character in the novel rather than just the writer. The *New York Times* takes this stance in order to shape reader reception of the novel in order to appeal to an audience at a time when bestsellers included nonfiction pieces such as *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* and *The Firmament of Time. The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* by William Shirer was a seminal history in 1960 revisiting Nazi Germany at a time of "willed forgetfulness of the horror of those years" (Rosenbaum). *The Firmament of Time* by Loren Eiseley explores the history of science as it was shaped by culture; Eiseley's work has also been regarded as seminal for his writing on natural science with the "soul and skill of a poet" ("The Firmament…"). These pieces reflected two separate academic communities seeking to provide answers and a different look at crucial points in history. Lee was the only female writer on the best seller list at times with a piece of fiction that was seemingly different from its counterparts, even as she artfully provided context to the injustices of racial politics and southern life at that time just as her counterparts gave insight to their fields of expertise. Scout is much more emotional and personal in comparison to Atticus' straightforward and factual nature thus making him a good figurehead for advertising the book in order to compete with Lee's contemporaries. Hans Koningsburger lamented the state of the novel in America being in danger, and that it

> can be saved only through the support of publishers, booksellers, and journalists who love books per se and who do not perpetually play up the sales angle or the 'news' aspect of a book, or the general and factual, rather than the personal and emotional importance of its subject (Koningsburger)

Koningsburger was convinced that the marketing of new novels would be an injustice to literature as the world knew it at that time. The solution was for those directly involved with the book industry to get back to their book-loving roots and cease retelling novels in a way that reflected a depiction of the world instead of showing their admiration for books that allowed an escape from the world. *Mockingbird* was providing context for southern life and racial injustice resembling the contemporary situation while reviews sold its "general and factual" manner via the presence of Atticus, making *Mockingbird* attractive to the book buyers that put Lee's contemporaries on best seller lists.

In addition to the role of Atticus, critics as well as advertisements in the *New York Times* rely heavily on statements implying that everyone is reading the rich and complex story developed by Lee. For example, an ad run in late July of 1960 starts with the headline "Everybody's listening to this mockingbird!" (Display Ad, July 1960). A month later, an ad headline reads, "the whole country is singing this mockingbird's praises" (Display Ad 19, August 1960). To further convince readers to make a purchase of the book, the ads feature multiple reviews from other book critics as well as individual testimonials. In both of these ads, statements by Richard Sullivan of the *Chicago Tribune* were used, though they were excerpted in a way that suited the *Times.* Sullivan's reviews were shortened to emphasize the "excellent piece of storytelling" that "will no doubt make readers slow down to enjoy its simplicity" (Display Ad 19, July 1960). This praise of Lee goes on to incorporate a minimal factual account of its characters and the Tom Robinson case that resembles

observations made by Hans Koningsburger while still incorporating the idea that other readers are engrossed by this compelling novel.

However, in the *New York Times*, critics spent little time in their articles discussing the Civil Rights tensions that were feeding the plot of the book and ignored the heroism of Boo Radley. The court case is labeled as "exciting and strangely hopeful" by Mitgang who then neutrally summarizes the court case and acknowledges the strife of African Americans in the novel just as "injustice in the South". At the time of *Mockingbird*'s release, the United States press was in the middle of covering the presidential race of John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Civil Rights were not front page headlines in the newspaper editions with *Mockingbird* reviews in them. The only mention in the days of the cited articles and advertisements was "Democrats Pledge to End Discrimination—Ask Big Budget" but this was a sub-headline and the article then failed to mention how Democrats planned to end discrimination in favor of giving an overview of the Democratic national convention.

In the *Chicago Tribune*, Richard Sullivan's review takes on a different tone. Scout is described first as a "pistol of a young girl" and unlike the *Times,* Sullivan does not divide the narration between Lee's voice and Scout's. The *Tribune* does make mention of Boo Radley, albeit briefly, labeling him as a "mysterious figure of the town who roams out of his house only by night" and a "lunatic" who murdered the villain (Sullivan). Sullivan highlights the richness of all the characters of the novel but does not cling to Atticus as the *Times* critics do. In an article by Robert Cromie for the *Tribune,* Cromie labeled the book as a "comparative oddity among

fiction works", because it can be enjoyed and you "need not apologize for it if your maiden aunt happens to leaf thru it" (Cromie). Cromie regarded *Mockingbird* as different from its best-selling counterparts at the time in that it was appropriate for more than one age group. Cromie's short article asked two women to review the novel and their response was both that of being engrossed in the novel and wanting to give copies of the novel as Christmas gifts in the coming months. Cromie glossed over the story stating it was a "charming tale of a small southern town viewed by a trio of youngsters" and then further praising Lee as an outstanding young writer. Other articles are of little significance, considering that they briefly touch on Lee's excellence and the number of weeks the book had been on the bestseller lists at the time. Ultimately the *Tribune* articles simply highlight the Lee's mastery as a new author in an effort to make a case for the novel being a sound purchase.

Much like the *New York Times,* the *Tribune* says little in regards to Civil Rights taking place at that time on its front page. Headlines on the days the articles mentioned previously focused on the presidential race along with one political cartoon mocking Lyndon B. Johnson as a "Civil Rights Squelcher", despite Johnson later becoming Kennedy's running mate. Beyond that political cartoon, Civil Rights era headlines were absent from the newspaper and there was no mention of the Tom Robinson case. The *Times* summarizes the case of Tom Robinson in two short sentences, but highlights the effect the aftermath of the court case had on Scout and Atticus.

In the *Los Angeles Times*, reviews did not carry the same tone as the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune,* which may be due in part to a different writing style. The

first noticeably different element was the book price mentioned in parenthesis in the first paragraph of Margaret Marble's column compared to others who inserted it at the end within the language of the text promoting the purchase of the novel. Readers of the *Los Angeles Times* had a few routes they could take with that knowledge; they could (at that point) determine whether the price of the book made it worthwhile to continuing to read the review or make a decision to buy the book regardless of the review because the price justified the purchase without a critic's opinion. This places a different outlook on reading the newspaper or even books on the west coast compared to Chicago or New York because the article places less significance on the social aspects of reading the same book as the rest of the crowd. Through the rest of the article, the reviewer takes more time to analyze Scout's character in accordance with Jem and her father as "all three of them swim against a stream of injustice and prejudice" (Marble) rather than trying to sell to the audience. In addition to Marble's fresh take on the Finch family facing "painful adjustments" together, the role of Atticus receives much less praise in comparison with the *Tribune* and *New York Times*. Atticus who is a "lawyer, scholar, and gentleman…provide[s] much of the best material in the book" through the lessons he teaches his children (Marble). Again, Atticus is the stronger figure of the novel despite Marble's description of Scout being a "bright little girl". Absent from this article is any mention of the Tom Robinson case or the role of Boo Radley. Marble instead favors highlighting the elements that make this an innocent southern novel. In the other article published in 1960 about *Mockingbird,* John Hutchins makes note of the court case in addition to Boo Radley and his family. Boo is a "a key [character]

who has been buried alive for years in a house nearby" (Hutchins). However, this article fails to characterize Scout, as Hutchins makes the novel seem like Lee is telling the story from a third-person perspective, even going so far as to say the climatic scene gives "aliveness to Miss Lee's narrative". This phrasing detracts from the fact that it is Scout's narrative, or spoken account of events unfolding in Maycomb. Hutchins also wastes no time in summarizing the Robinson case, describing it as "a negro [who] is falsely accused of raping a moronic young white woman" (Hutchins). This description is the most straightforward approach to understanding the case, in comparison with the *Tribune* referring to it as one of two "grave problems" and the *NY Times* referring to it as "injustice in the South" (Mitgang). Initially, the *Los Angeles Times* is different from the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune,* because it does not emphasize the social benefits of reading the book, but falls short of recognizing Scout as a strong narrator who idolizes her father.

Once again, in the headlines of the *Los Angeles Times* there is no mention of Civil Rights, but the approach to the Tom Robinson case is much more direct in comparison to the newspaper's Eastern counterparts. There is a small mention following the front page of the *LA Times* of the administration at the time abandoning plans for a Civil Rights Bill. Interestingly, in the *NY Times* on the same day as a critic's review was published, the Democratic National Convention reporting that appeared in the headlines was written by an *LA Times* reporter but as previously mentioned, the article had no evidence as to what the Civil Rights platform involved. The lack of definite details is reflective of the tone captured by

Los Angles and New York Times critics, which involves factual accounts of actions, but void of the details that could spur debate. The absence of details reflects newspapers taking for granted readership spanning over multiple days or morning/nightly editions, rather than a reader happening upon news days after the event initially unfolded.

In the South, there was no mention of *Mockingbird* in the immediate year after its release. Of available newspapers, the *Atlanta Daily World* did not cover anything involving the novel until the 1963 movie release. The articles used in the Atlanta paper were stories borrowed from a New York publication, and not original to the newspaper. Why there was no mention can only be hypothesized, but in that lies the question of what was actually happening historically in the South that might have prevented journalists from writing about *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Historically, sit-ins were on the rise in North Carolina, along with the organization of nonviolent protestor groups (Civil Rights Chronology). Otherwise, there is a low amount of visible activity beyond politicians working towards a political platform for Civil Rights in comparison to the high visibility of events in the Freedom Summer of 1964.

In 1960, critics were in awe of the young writer named Harper Lee who was bursting onto the scene with such a rich novel loaded with a cast of characters and nestled in southern charm. Tone varied across newspapers in the United States, each catering to the nature of their respective readerships. Where writers took notice of Atticus Finch, they were enamored with his presence and centered their article on his nobility. Where he was not the center of attention, writers marveled at

Lee's storytelling. Critics by in large did not forget to acknowledge Scout Finch, but seldom was she admired quite like Atticus, and in many cases critics separated the narration as not being solely owned by Scout but rather attributed directly to Lee. Historically speaking, a Civil Right timeline running through the newspapers is difficult to track because the papers limited repeated information in articles, assuming a daily reader following the news as it breaks, instead of planning for readers who might start reading a few days after something happens, let alone more than 50 years in the future. It is likely that there was no need to recount what was happening in Civil Rights History at the time because it had been mentioned in the newspaper's last edition (evening, morning, or prior day) and were preventing redundancy in stories and just providing updates to other headlines. Critics tend to shy away from Scout's character, eager to focus their attention on Atticus as well as separate Scout from the narration, falsely assuming the Harper Lee is personally telling the story rather than Scout.

Chapter 2: Education and the *Mockingbird*

Education and *To Kill a Mockingbird* go hand in hand. In the background of the novel's high points of action lies a lesson learned or what Jem and Scout are doing or have done in school. In *Scout, Atticus, and Boo,* a collection of interviews about *Mockingbird,* long time fans of the novel recount their first experience and why the novel remains relevant to them. But both within and outside of the novel, *Mockingbird* does not have an excellent track record with educational institutions. In just its second chapter, the State of Alabama's new, progressive education, rears

its head in the form of Miss Caroline confronting Scout, much to her dismay. On her first day of school, Miss Caroline, Scout's teacher, reprimanded her for coming to school already knowing how to read. Miss Caroline instructed Scout to "tell [her] father not to teach [her] anymore… [She]'ll take over from here and try to undo the damage" (Lee, 17). Scout took offense to this instruction because reading was something she shared with Atticus every evening and could not remember when she first learned to read. "Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing." (Lee, 18). It came as natural as breathing and was an opportunity for her to bond with her father in the evenings when he was too tired to play with his children. While Scout was not engaged with critically thinking about racial politics, students reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* are still guided into understanding the lesson at hand in a matter consistent with the points a teacher is trying to make.

The theory behind the teaching method derives from John Dewey's *Schools of To-Morrow*, which seeks to engage children in organic learning by experience. The point was to not "rush children into literacy if they do not seem to take an interest in it" (Frank, 48), in order to keep intelligent children engaged in the classroom and lay the groundwork for further education. Miss Caroline is trying to set Scout up to learn by experience with the class and not by someone forcing her to sit down and learn, but Scout's personal experience is consistent with the educational theory; she learned by experience at home rather than with the class. As the education system continues to fail Scout, Lee subtly critiques John Dewey's educational theories as Scout disagrees with her teachers. Students in the *Mockingbird* world, like much of

the Alabama progressive education system, were continually reminded how much better it was to be a part of the group rather than building the idea of individualism. Scout explains the struggle of first grade as:

> … no more auspicious than the first. Indeed, they were an endless Project that slowly evolved into a Unit, in which miles of construction paper and wax crayon were expended by the State of Alabama in its well-meaning but fruitless efforts to teach me Group Dynamics (Lee, 32).

Scout was learning to blend into the crowd and learn at the same rate as the rest of the class as she went to school against her wishes. "Group Dynamics" as they are capitalized in the text, encourage individuals to "think about his or her relationship to the life of the collective" (Frank, 50). Here, through the bored voice of Scout, Lee is criticizing the progressive approach to fit the individual into social life rather than allowing free pursuit of an individual's passion. In the following years, Scout must share "Current Events" in front of the class and "being singled out made her more than ever anxious to return to the Group" (Lee, 243). Jeff Frank points out that "instead of making students active participants in civic life, 'Current Events' reminds students that it is better to be a part of the 'Group' than an individual who is able to think for her- or himself" (Frank, 51). In Scout's struggle against her education, Atticus remains a shining figurehead for how she wishes things could be. Scout struggles against the fact that Atticus did not have formal schooling, as he and his brother Jack were taught by their father at home, yet Atticus still became an outstanding individual in their community.

Whether Lee is truly trying to criticize the "Dewey Decimal System", as Jem refers to it (Lee, 32) in education, is never made completely clear in the acts of

Scout. Nonetheless, education's promotion of individuality is largely absent from what is taught in schools. Education's partnership with *To Kill a Mockingbird* has a checkered history in the fifty years since its release. Many have cited its prevalence in the classroom, but it is hard to pinpoint how many schools use it or when exactly the book made its way onto school syllabi. While the number of readers is hard to prove statistically speaking, it can be noted that 750,000 to 1 million copies are sold annually, and to date more than 40 million copies of the novel have been sold overall (Rella).

Across the board, educators who have written about the novel frequently emphasize its racial politics lesson because of its universal nature. A teacher, Laurie Hagberg writes,

> …after reaching the point in the book at which racial tensions are keenest, we read Dr. King's speech. In small groups, students discuss whether they think people today are judged by the content of their character or the color of their skin. As students discuss the speech, they are also discussing one of the universal themes of the novel. At the same time, we study the elements of effective text-based arguments in preparation for the students writing persuasive essays supporting their opinions. The result is authentic literacy that the students enjoy, see as relevant, and use as a catalyst for further reflection and writing (Hagberg)

With *Mockingbird* tension at its peak, students are at their most receptive to better understanding universally relevant themes. However, this teacher's approach raises the question of when "racial tensions are keenest" in the novel. Scout begins to understand the racism around her, along with the struggles of being an individual in the midst of all of it. Scout witnesses townsmen attempt to break in the jail and hang Tom Robinson, but Lee had not established Tom as character beyond the accusations against him. Tom is not yet an individual and made entirely of how

other people judge him by the surface, or color of his skin. Alternatively, racial politics are at a peak when Atticus goes into the case knowing he will lose, but still challenges the jury to look inwardly at the fact that everyone lies, black or white.

Wally Lamb, author of *She's Come Undone* and other best sellers was a teacher of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for nearly twenty-five years. In an interview for *Scout, Atticus & Boo,* Lamb recalls reading the book for the first time as an early high school project not long after the film's release. He was engrossed by it unlike other books he had read and it was the first book he considered when he stepped into his role as a teacher. When he taught it,

> There was a lot of racial turmoil in the country. Because the characters become sort of personally applicable, I think a story can go a lot further lots of times than a headline can or something on the six-thirty news…in its own way [Mockingbird] sort of triggers the beginning of change and certainly puts onto the stage the questions of racial equality and bigotry in the way Stowe's *Uncle Toms Cabin* sort of stirred things up (Murphy, 113).

The lessons taught here as a response to racial turmoil have been relevant for a long time, and will likely continue to be in the United States. But *Mockingbird* grabs its readers no matter the headlines because it can be so personally relevant to the young adult holding it. When the book first entered classrooms, teachers had much more freedom to select the literature and the lessons they derived from texts compared to current curriculum standards today. Lamb and Hagberg went for the obvious because for them, as for many other readers, the novel's "moralities get stuck in you and may not save you, may not make you do the right thing, but at least you know you're doing the wrong thing" (Murphy, 60). Students can easily grasp the moral issues front and center in the novel, whether they agree with it or not.

Similar sentiments echo through the statements of other past and present teachers as they explain the universal nature of the book's themes and how popular it is with the students. Other accounts of *Mockingbird* intertwined with education continue to recount the court case. Lee Smith writes in *Scout, Atticus & Boo,* "The first thing that strikes you so strongly is the depiction of racism and the tragedy of race" but undeniably "students are reading it today with the same responses we all had in the sixties…it never ages. It's told in such beautifully specific terms that it never seems generic." (Murphy). Smith claims to have read the book more than twenty times and acknowledges that it rewards the reader each time as evidenced in student reception. When the educators that report their way of teaching the text carry the same thread of universal racial politics, the idea of being generic becomes complicated. Smith mentions the book prompting conversation among groups of quiet adolescents, and like much of *Scout, Atticus & Boo,* a collection of interviews and on *Mockingbird,* many begin the conversation with "I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* when I was*…".* Students respond to the text in similar ways and teachers can reuse the same test year after year. The struggle for individuality in the classroom that Scout fought so hard for is nearly rejected by a teacher returning to the same lessons taught year after year.

As recently as 2016, *Mockingbird* is still challenged in schools. Reasons range from objections to vulgar language, profanity, racial slurs and sexual content, to its being "filthy" and "trashy", or even for simply being in conflict "with values of the community" in one Texas town (Downs). According to the American Library Association, *Mockingbird* currently sits as the fourth most banned book in the

United States, behind *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck ("Banned"). Frequently, parents reach out to school systems in order to ban a book, which is the case with the most recent ban of *Mockingbird* in Accomack, Virginia for its use of the N-word. In this particular case, the parent feared the recurrence of the word in the text would "teach children that using the racial slur was acceptable" (Schaub). But this tends to be a sentiment shared by many parents seeking to ban *Mockingbird;* it's a blanket attempt to protect children from the very things the novel is trying to teach its readers to avoid.

It was that first ban of *Mockingbird* that spurred Harper Lee to speak up for her book when she wrote a letter to the Hanover, Virginia school board. In this letter comprised of five dense sentences and published by *The Richmond News Leader*, Lee makes the case that it is a simple book with Christian ethics and "that the problem is one of illiteracy, not Marxism" (Devasher). She saw the situation as an example of doublethink consistent with *1984* by George Orwell, but Marxism is not the root of *Mockingbird* being labeled as "immoral" rather it was ignorance of what the book truly stood for. The letter closes with the promise of a donation to the Beadle Bumble Fund, a project set up by the newspaper before the book banning to cover "official stupidities" which offered free copies of *Mockingbird* to children who wrote to the paper asking for one. Her hope for the donation was that it would "be used to enroll the Hanover County School Board in any first grade of its choice" (Devasher). Lee believed that the people working against reading her book were simply unaware of how the novel's big picture themes worked. Lee's donation bought 50

books for the young adult readers of Hanover and her contribution in general encouraged resistance against banning her book. In the Hanover case, the editor of *The Richmond New Leader*, James Kilpatrick, rallied against the state's decision to leave *Mockingbird* off its subsidized list. Similarly, the Accomack ban fueled debate throughout the school district with protests and petitions fighting the censorship at hand.

Across the board, one thing rings true to the essence of education and *To Kill a Mockingbird:* racial politics remain relevant. The marketing and reviews for the book, as evidenced previously, all tackle the politics differently. Every publication made note of the case against Tom Robinson and made it the subject of its discussion, or mentioned it and moved on. However, as the book moved into the classroom, it was wildly unexpected that the novel would have such a long-standing presence. Lippincott originally only predicted the novel to sell two to four thousand copies (Rella). *Mockingbird* entered book clubs and found its way into the hands of educators, and everyone continued to focus on discussing its racial politics. Wally Lamb testifies that it influenced one group of students to stage a demonstration for a black history class in their curriculum. *To Kill a Mockingbird* "triggers the beginning of change" (Murphy, 112).

In the end, the potential for *To Kill a Mockingbird* is limitless in the hands of its critically receptive young adult readers if it is not flattened out by educators and marketing to simply represent a book engaging the moral issues in racial politics. What is likely the most crucial point teachers are trying to make involves engaging students to think critically about the treatment of their peers. There is a radio

silence considering the other politics at work in *Mockingbird* such as the struggle against education even though it remains the main source for an impressionable, vocal audience. The issue of individualism in comparison to blending in with the crowd is newly topical, with frequent headlines of bullying against children viewed as outsiders grazing news headlines. There is even room in the discussion of *Mockingbird* to shine a light on Lee's more recent novel, *Go Set a Watchman.* The two books should not be read as prequels or sequels of each other, but they do tend to highlight similar issues. *Watchman* touches on the faults in the southern education system, as well as racial tensions as the town reels from Civil Rights laws and the end of Jim Crow's reign in the South.

Chapter 3: Adapting *To Kill a Mockingbird*

The success of *To Kill a Mockingbird* cannot be explained without its adaptations in the following years. The environment of *Mockingbird* fans leans heavily on having read the book at some point between eighth and tenth grade and subsequently the nostalgia resonating from that period. *Mockingbird* has been made into films, stage plays, used in art and poetry, referenced in other literature and film, and in the age of the internet it has grown to become the focus of fanfiction and blogging. Writer Michael Freedland made the claim following Harper Lee's death that *Mockingbird* did not reach

> huge international fame just because *To Kill a Mockingbird* won a Pulitzer Prize. Nor is it because any secondary school worth its name features it in their syllabus. Or even that her novel is an astonishing plea for good race relations involving simple humanity, a rare thing half a century or more ago to trip off the typewriter of a

> white woman in the deep south. No, her renown has a lot to do with Gregory Peck. (Freedland)

While this statement by Freedland is loaded with opinion, it does point out that the meat of the novel is not the only thing keeping it alive to this day. Nevertheless, it focuses the success on Gregory Peck, who played Atticus in the film adaptation of *Mockingbird.* Yes, Peck has awards for his role for as Atticus therefore legitimizing his excellence. However, multiple factors that developed in the years following *Mockingbird*'s release established its fame and kept it alive. Adaptations, like book reviews and lesson plans in schools, reflect how readers experienced the text—what their favorite quotes were, who their favorite characters were, or what they perceived as critical points in the text. The lens of fan adaptation allows for additions to and subtractions from the source text, bringing to light the unique experience readers have that can unite or divide an audience as well as determine the longevity of a text's readership.

Following the release of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* anticipation ran high for the novel to be adapted into a film. Producer Alan Pakula and director Robert Mulligan acquired the rights to the book after it had spent six weeks on the bestseller list. Harper Lee opted out of writing *Mockingbird*'s screenplay, insisting that she "did not want to dramatize it" (Snyder, 202) and instead Horton Foote was asked to adapt the novel. Roughly two years later, on December 25, 1962, the film starring Gregory Peck as Atticus came to theaters.

In the creation of the film, Mulligan and Pakula made sure to involve Harper Lee. In November of 1961, production designer Henry Bumsted met Lee in Monroeville, Alabama in order to understand the small, southern town life as well as

get Lee's specific ideas on how the neighborhoods should look based on her experience of Depression-era Alabama as she imagined it in the book. Lee's role with the screenplay was different. As mentioned previously, Lee chose not to write the screenplay and instead worked with Horton Foote on it. While the two did some work together, Foote eventually came to the conclusion as noted in an interview that he eventually had to inform Lee "there's going to come a time when this has got to belong to me and I've got to take this over" (Middleton). Lee understood this fact and supported Foote in his work, but when it became his, he had to add scenes that were not in the novel and condense a span of three years into one. Foote was conscious of the risk that this posed to the novel, and defended his changes, stating, "there's a great cry that adapting novels into film ruins them, and of course sometimes it does. But you can ruin them as well if you're too literal about them and do exactly what is there in fictional form" (Middleton). The opinion that adaptation ruins or enhances a book still needs to be argued in the case of *Mockingbird*. Many considered the film to be a success, and it had Lee's blessing as she assisted in its production. Surely, this would keep the novel as true as possible to its original fictional form; nevertheless, it still is not the same as the novel.

Gregory Peck also took care to understand Lee's vision for the role of Atticus and her creation of the character. Lee based the character of Atticus on her father, Amasa Coleman Lee, and Peck visited Lee's ailing father in Monroeville in order to do the character justice. As noted in the Oscars manuscript inventories, Peck took extensive notes as he stepped into the role of Atticus. These notes hinted at what Peck knew was important to the matter at hand, and in his script, he instructed

himself to "give it weight" and "don't let them down" ("Cinematic Life"). Peck's performance as Atticus granted him what he called a "pipeline to teens" and had "at least fifty young men over the years tell [him] that they became lawyers because of that film" (Goodman). Peck is careful in his reflections on the film to avoid giving himself more importance than necessary. He explains the success in terms of "the warmth between widowed father and two kids and the way he spoke to them" (Goodman).

Thanks to the film, Peck and Lee would become lifelong friends, with a bond strong enough that Lee would even grant an interview to a later boastful journalist composing a biography on Peck. This journalist, Michael Freedman, was proud of his interview; his enthusiasm is reflected in his article titled "I'm the only journalist alive to have interviewed Harper Lee – and it's all thanks to Gregory Peck." This interview granted a rare insight into Harper Lee and her concern with the view others had of her. When Freedman tried to record this interview, Lee stopped him from so that she was "not misquoted" (Freedman). Freedman expected Lee to complain about Peck, as authors in his experience usually dislike the portrayal of their characters, and the role of Atticus was such a high-stakes one since he was so closely modeled on her own father. However, Lee's response was, on the contrary, "in that film, the man and the part met" (Freedman), because Peck understood the role through his encounter with Lee's father. In the film adaptation, Lee's perception of how Atticus was portrayed gave her reason to continue to exert rights for the authorial control of rights of the novel. At the point of the 1978 interview, she had received many offers for stage plays and television, but always refused. Lee wanted

Atticus and herself to be seen in a certain way, and authorization to add to this reception was intentionally made hard to obtain.

In 1991, Christopher Sergel gained permission to copyright his stage adaptation of the novel, despite Lee's grip on the use of *Mockingbird* (Ihler). Sergel reportedly spent more than twenty years on his adaptation of the novel. Lee's hometown of Monroeville, Alabama has performed the Sergel adaptation every summer since its release, and it has been performed across the United States as well as internationally. In February 2016, it was announced that after producer Scott Rudin had acquired rights to the stage adaptation, the play would be re-written by Aaron Sorkin for Broadway in Autumn of 2017. Each stage adaptation takes a slightly different look at *Mockingbird*, Sorkin's adaptation being described as a "play about a small-town lawyer in the deep south" (Viagas) and Sergel's adaptation as "the timeless tale of Atticus Finch and his battle against racism." Both of these adaptations, if the journalists' descriptions are to be believed, fail to put Scout at the center of attention. The trouble with putting *Mockingbird* in the hands of actors for an audience experiencing the story for the first time is making the timeline work. Given that Sergel's adaptation was intended for the use of middle and high school productions, the play has to be organized in a way that would make it simpler for younger audiences to be able to watch or perform the play. Sorkin's adaptation has not yet premiered, so the impact that this new adaptation will have has yet to be seen.

To Kill a Mockingbird has had a long-standing effect on film culture apart from the actual *Mockingbird* film. Evidence of the trail it left behind can be seen as

recently as on a nightstand in the film adaptation of *Perks of Being a Wallflower (2012),* or its mention in the Netflix show *Orange is the New Black* (2013). On the social media platform Tumblr, where micro-bloggers share posts related to their lives or the interests of a particular community, *Mockingbird* continues to see life as users post their favorite quotes, screen grabs from the film, fan art, opinion posts and external mentions, and "reblog" these posts from their preferred blogs. Readers repeatedly latch on to the quote, "until I feared I would lose it, I never loved reading. One does not love breathing," and as if by an unspoken rule of the Tumblr community, the "reblogger" does not comment below the quote out of respect for the source text. The references in *Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Orange is the New Black* are also shared on Tumblr, with *Mockingbird* reaching more than its nostalgic audiences, but also to fans of *Perks* and *Orange.* In the rise of internet fan communities, the reach of *Mockingbird* has expanded beyond people purposely seeking to read the novel or watch the film.

The community building done on sites such as Tumblr trend across other platforms filled with media consumption and review. When book fans began convening online, sharing reader hypotheses and ideas about *Mockingbird* became easier thanks to the rise of fanfiction sites. Defined "as any work which embellishes, alters or rewrites the work of another (usually a published author) with new storylines, characters, alternative endings, beginnings and substitute sets of morals, ideals or sexual politics" (Downes), fanfiction encompasses many forms of fan imagination. Fanfiction came into existence long before the Internet, but it has become increasingly popular within the last ten years for readers and writers as

sharing it became simpler and less formalized. Writing produced in the forums such as FanFiction.net or ArchiveOfOurOwn.org tend to be approached by critics as Internet dark matter, as the writers on the sites are typically young, inexperienced writers exploring plot holes or continuing a story where the source writer ended the novel.

Looking past the errors of young writers, these texts give insight into how *To Kill a Mockingbird* was received by readers. Lee's second novel, *Go Set a Watchman,* had little effect on the small fanfiction writing community around *To Kill a Mockingbird,* and the universe did not expand to include pieces focused solely on *Watchman.* What little mention was made only signified whether the writer had read *Watchman* and smaller details such as Scout's mother's name, the change from Scout to Jean, and calling out details the writer chose not to accept from *Watchman.* Writers opted not to accept Jem's premature death and continued to write pieces exploring a romantic relationship between Scout and Dill as adults, instead of her relationship with Hank.

Where Scout is the focus of fanfiction, writers go into Scout's wanting to know more about her mother and place her within historical contexts such as World War II. When writers explore the life of Atticus, they typically delve into his relationship with his late wife and the father/daughter relationship with Scout. These are the most frequent expansions of the story, with few attempts made by the writers to rewrite Harper Lee. There are a handful of glimpses of a *Mockingbird* void of Boo Radley saving the day but the vast majority of fanfiction does not touch the original "universe" built by Harper Lee, as if by an unspoken rule.

The realm of possibility for adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is both limited and limitless. The trouble with *Mockingbird* comes from Harper Lee in life and death. In her lifetime, she kept a close grip on what could be done with the text and how the audience of the book would receive the story. It was important to her that the story would be told, so she saw to it that it was done right or not at all. In her old age and since her death, her devoted fans have stepped in to defend her wishes as bloggers and writers respect her original text and are quick to defend the controversial *Go Set a Watchman.* While *Mockingbird* will undoubtedly still see change over time, the full effect adaptation has on the source text is just as limited as its readers let it be. For the evolving means of novel adaptation, there are rules to how it can be done. In film, it was restructured to deal with time constraints, while the stage relies on constant revival and now on re-adaptation by fresh collaborators. In Internet forums, the novel is referenced with nostalgia and often has a physical presence or alluded to on popular shows and in books. Across all adaptations, respecting the original source text remains at the forefront. Adaptation keeps the excitement for the novel alive, be it through new readers expressing their gratitude and sharing it with others, or experienced readers seeking to revel in the history they share with the novel. Adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is entirely dependent on its audience to continually mold it to fit to the environment it is used in as long as the community rules are obeyed.

Chapter 4: *Go Set a Watchman*—Finally Found?

In February of 2015, HarperCollins broke the news that a second novel by Harper Lee had been found in a safe-deposit box, and would be published in July of that year. The news spread like wildfire, and writers across the United States speculated on its publication. Harper Lee was aging and her silence about a second novel was understood and for the most part accepted, because her thoughts on publishing were supposedly known. Harper Lee had perpetuated hopes in the decade following the release of *Mockingbird* that there was another piece in the works, until the public became reconciled to her not wanting to publish again. Questions bombarded Harper Lee's circle of lawyers, agents, and publishers. People wanted to know how the manuscript was found and if this was what Lee really wanted. Nevertheless, with much fanfare, *Go Set a Watchman* did come out, setting records for pre-ordered copies—a best seller even before critics added their reviews. Readers were not in awe of the long awaited *Watchman.* Where it fit into the timeline of *Mockingbird* was up in the air and whom this set of characters were came up for debate. To answer the questions that lead back to *Go Set a Watchman,* there is no easy way to diagnose the ambiguity of Harper Lee, the text itself, or the moving parts in publication because of how the media has been flooded with conflicting accounts.

The original publisher of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, J.B. Lippincott, had hoped for a second novel by Harper Lee since *Mockingbird* came under contract. In letters between Lee and her literary agent Annie Laurie Williams, they discussed "publishing *Mockingbird* first, *Watchman* last, and a shorter connecting novel

between the two" (Flood). *Watchman,* as it appeared in visitor cards kept by Williams, was definitely written before *Mockingbird.* The cards show the initial title of a manuscript by Nelle Harper Lee, received by J.B. Lippincott in January of 1957 as *Go Set a Watchman* (Nielson). The cards kept by Williams tracked the timeline of Lee turning in fifty pages of work every week until its completion in February of 1957 and then edited until October of the same year when it was sold and brought under contract with Lippincott. Lee continued to edit for the following two years, and on the third card in the series, the title at the top of the card changed to *To Kill a Mockingbird.* The exact point of the title change has only been assumed by scholars based on the noted dates and Lee's known writing habits. The last date of 1957 notes *Watchman* being sold to Lippincott and the next date is a year later, reading, "10-27-58: p 1 thru 299 of revised ms brought in by author --- picked up by author 10-28-58," and then the following year "5-4-59: 1 copy of newly revised ms brought in by author" (Nielson). After this note, the next card begins with the title *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the dates come at regular intervals as they initially did when Lee began working with Williams. Lee was said to have become good friends with Williams, making "documentation concerning Lee's writing and revision process scant" because so much of the discussion was done in person (Nielson). In one of four public interviews, Lee stated of her writing that "when I get into work I don't want to leave it. As a result I'll go for days and days without leaving the house or wherever I happen to be" (Lee). To explain the gap in dates, Lee was likely so deep into writing what would become *Mockingbird* that she did not turn in regular pieces of her manuscript to Lippincott as she had the previous year. The title change and

notes show the manuscripts shift and give proof of Lee's work beginning with *Go Set a Watchman.*

However, sources indirectly support the claim that publishing *Watchman* was not an option. Serge Kovalesky wrote in the *New York Times* that according to documentation similar to William's cards provided by Columbia University, *Watchman* was never intended to be published. This information conflicts with information given to *The Guardian* by Lee's foreign-rights agent, Andrew Nurnberg. Nurnberg stated that the letters discussed the publication as part of a trilogy as stated previously. This discrepancy comes down to splitting hairs and personal interpretation of letters where neither Kovalesky or Nurnberg acknowledge how much is missing of the physical documentation of the correspondence between Lee and her publication partners. While Nurnberg may ultimately be the expert as one of Lee's agents, he was not the agent until 2013 nor was he privy to the same documents provided by Columbia University as Kovalesky.

Somewhere along the way following *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s release, Harper Lee lost her nerve for pushing forward with a new novel. In the previously mentioned interview, Lee told Roy Newquist that she was still writing, but it "goes slowly, ever so slowly" (Lee). Of her success with *Mockingbird*, Lee stated

> I didn't expect the book to sell in the first place. I was hoping for a quick and merciful death at the hands of reviewers, but at the same time I sort of hoped that maybe someone would like it enough to give me encouragement. Public encouragement. I hoped for a little, as I said, but I got rather a whole lot, and in some ways this was just about as frightening as the quick, merciful death I'd expected. (Lee)

Lee, much like her publisher, did not expect such a strong response to *Mockingbird* from the public from the start, and instead was hoping for a soft entrance into the world of published authorship. She had plans to continue to document Southern life and "be the Jane Austen of south Alabama" (Lee). In the 1980's Lee was rumored to be working on a nonfiction novel titled *The Reverend,* a true crime novel that obviously never came to light ("Harper Lee") as well as at some point supposedly working on another piece titled *The Long Goodbye* (Wilson). Nevertheless, proof of these texts' existence remains to be seen and Lee was always wary of the public and its reaction to anything regarding her producing a new text.

When HarperCollins announced the publication of *Watchman,* the inner workings of Harper Lee's life became much more apparent to her audience. Concerned friends of Lee were suspicious of Lee's lawyer and bearer of her power of attorney, Tonja Carter. The ensuing media frenzy led Carter to publish a piece in the *Wall Street Journal* detailing her claim to have found the manuscript in a safety deposit box in 2014, though those who have seen the box deny the existence of a manuscript. In 2011, Jason Caldwell, a rare book expert from Sotheby's auction house met with Carter and Samuel Pinkus to appraise a *Mockingbird* manuscript for insurance and other purposes (Kovalesky & Alter). In the safety deposit box was a publisher's copy of *Mockingbird* and another manuscript with similar older characters, but still considered an early version of *Mockingbird*. Carter claimed to have been out of the room when this happened and claimed that, "If Sam [Pinkus] discovered the 'Go Set a Watchman' manuscript at that time, he told neither me nor Miss Alice nor Nelle" (Kovalesky & Alter). Carter's whereabouts have been disputed

by Pinkus and Sotheby's who can confirm she was there, but cannot release records that would definitively say what was held in the safe-deposit box. Publisher HarperCollins was aware of the controversy surrounding Carter, and chose to believe her story of "stumbling upon" the manuscript (Giraldi). If the manuscript was not in the safe-deposit box in 2011, then where was it or where else could Carter have procured it? It is highly unlikely that in Lee's declining health she was able to produce a text between 2011 and 2015, but no conclusions about where the text came from were ever drawn before the novel was released.

The well-being of Harper Lee was also called into question with the announcement of *Go Set a Watchman.* In 2007, Lee suffered a stroke after which point her sister, Alice, stated that Harper "can't see and can't hear and will sign anything put before her by anyone in whom she has confidence" in addition to her memory failing (Giraldi). Naturally, the worried public wanted to know what Harper Lee's thoughts were on the long awaited novel. A statement released on behalf of Lee reads,

> I hadn't realized it had survived, so was surprised and delighted when my dear friend and lawyer Tonja Carter discovered it. After much thought and hesitation I shared it with a handful of people I trust and was pleased to hear that they considered it worthy of publication. I am humbled and amazed that this will now be published after all these years. (Giraldi)

Monroeville-area residents were skeptical about the veracity of the quotation, citing her identification of Carter as a "dear friend" and her claiming to be "amazed" that the book would be published "after all these years" because it was so out of character for the Nelle Harper Lee they knew (Sheets). When anyone visited Lee, her sensory deficits were known and she had both good and bad days, being either

lively and sharp or depressed and confused (Kovaleski et al.). When the State of Alabama investigated Lee's well-being after an anonymous complaint and concluded that she was of sound mind and body, fans remained upset about the ruling. The questionable state of Lee's health polarized the audience, as many still wanted to read the text but others were vocal about not reading the book. Any statement that could come from Lee would be received with critical eyes, because nothing that happened behind closed door was certain if, as was alleged, Lee would agree to anything set in front of her or if Carter was forcing Lee to say only non-damaging things about herself.

Still, without sufficient reasons to prevent its publishing, *Go Set a Watchman* was released in July of 2015. Attached to Michiko Kakutani's review before the book's release was the first chapter of *Watchman.* Before the public could even dig into the entirety of the novel, the "exclusive" preview "set off a furious wave of articles, think pieces and parental anguish stemming from Atticus Finch's newly revealed racism" (Schonfield). The first chapter of *Watchman* dropped numerous bombshells about where the story of the aged Finch family would go, as Jem has died, Scout became Jean Louise, and Atticus was no longer the moral compass fans had looked up to. Many readers assumed *The Times* negotiated a sneak preview of the book, but this was not the case. This early release violated HarperCollins' strict embargo over *Watchman* but *The Times* did not receive the file from HarperCollins. Communications director for *The New York Times,* Danielle Rhoades Ha, stated of the embargo, "Our policy is that we do not honor embargoes if we obtain a book independent of publishers' official channels" but both Ha and Kakutani declined to

indicate the source they received the text from (Schonfield). The early release did little for *The Times* other than to remain a voice in the release of *Watchman* and increase a readership rate on the article. This "exclusive" access to *Watchman* did not eclipse the record setting volume of novel pre-sales. Instead, it merely added to speculation in the sea of turmoil surrounding the book.

For those that read the book in spite of all that had gone down in the prior months, the content of *Watchman* proved to be troubling. Many went into the novel expecting a sequel to *To Kill a Mockingbird* where they would be reunited with their beloved characters and find out what happened to them after *Mockingbird* left off. But the warm and fuzzy expectations would fall flat for many readers. This Atticus was not the God-like figure a young Scout Finch painted him to be. *Watchman* Atticus was no longer an upholder of the judiciary system but instead a bigot who believed the court was incapable of handling the civil rights movement properly. The mutation of the Maycomb crew was "disturbing and disorienting" to readers (Kakutani). The transition from *Mockingbird* to *Watchman* called for the supposed connector book as devised by Lippincott's trilogy plan. But all that remains to explain it is Lee claiming the text as a "parent" to *Mockingbird.* Michiko Kakutani asked in a *New York Times* review, " How could a lumpy tale about a young woman's grief over her discovery of her father's bigoted views evolve into a classic coming-of-age story about two children and their devoted widower father?" (Kakutani). This question points to the confusion of *Watchman*'s readership—how did this story come to be so complex? Chronologically, *Watchman* should be the sequel to *Mockingbird* because it depicts the later lives of the Finch family. But in lineage,

Watchman is, as previously stated, a parent to *Mockingbird.* The trouble of understanding where *Watchman* sits in relation to *Mockingbird* remains; honoring Lee's vision of *Watchman* as the parent makes it harder to grapple with the "child" text when it features the characters as younger, better versions of themselves. Aging characters, like people, are expected to evolve, not digress. The easier option, as it seems, would be to separate the two texts—similar setting, character names, and backstory but not dependent on each other.

Marred by the drama that unfolded after its release in 2015, *Go Set a Watchman* came out fifty-five years after *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but it will never reach the same heights as its counterpart. There is not, and likely never will be, any real proof of Harper Lee's wishes for the text available to the public. Because of the shaky circumstances surrounding the 2015 release, any proof of plans for *Watchman* will be hard to accept due to the rumor mill and the questionable acts of the lawyer Tonja Carter's control over Lee's estate. To find an exact point in time where Lee actually said she did not wish to publish another book is hard to come by, as many articles discussing Lee and publication depend on statements by Lee's acquaintances, rather than Lee herself. Interpretation of *Go Set a Watchman* is now in the hands of an audience who is either unconcerned with the issues surrounding the text or curious about the text because of the issues surrounding it.

Conclusion—The *Mockingbird* Lives On

The story of *To Kill a Mockingbird* has yet to be finished, and may never be finished. There is a sense of mystery shrouding the history of the novel and its

creator, but it will remain in the dark because of Harper Lee's death in early 2016. When Harper Lee died, though talk surrounding her had died down there was still an unsettled audience. Lee was notoriously quiet with her business endeavors, and despite the rumors that swirled around her, she rarely reached out to dispel any of them.

When *Mockingbird* was released in July of 1960, critics across the country praised the novel in their amazement at Lee's storytelling. Reviewers found Lee's style to be entertaining, fresh, and delightful in the midst of Mockingbird's southern charm. Atticus Finch was the shining star of the book review section because of his nobility and the God-like status bestowed upon him by his daughter, Scout. Scout was not lost in reviews, but reviewers opted to believe Lee was responsible for the narration rather than a young girl like Scout being at the helm of the novel. This focus on Atticus reduces the importance of other key figures and central plot points necessary to understanding the story. Major news stories in the newspapers the reviews were printed in that day were focused on the election coming in the late fall and what the parties intended to do for their seat in office. Civil Rights were not in the spotlight as they would be four years later, despite reviewers highlighting the prevalence of the Tom Robinson case. Reviews of the book catered to the audience's social outlets, but also worked to make it seem general and factual like its counterparts.

When *Mockingbird* entered into the education system, it flattened out to represent its engagement with moral issues in racial politics. Young adult readers have limitless potential to engage with the book but the simplification done by

educators prevents students from bridging the gap to the other politics at work. Students in eighth and ninth grade are at a turning point where they begin to recognize their individuality, a topic students relate to as Scout is learning the price of being different from her peers. As education evolves, there is room to bring *Go Set a Watchman* into the classroom. While *Mockingbird* shows the direct effect southern education had on its pupils, *Watchman* exhibits the faults in southern education after Scout has graduated from the system. *Watchman* is also capable of incorporating racial tensions as the result of Civil Rights and Jim Crow laws.

While *To Kill a Mockingbird* has held a long-standing presence in the classroom, adaptation of it has simultaneously evolved and aged with its readers. The adaptations of *Mockingbird* include a film released three years after the book and stage play adaptation thirty years after the book was released, and then with the rise of the internet came opportunity for fans to write fanfiction and share favorite scenes, art, and quotes in social media sites. However, adaptation is made complicated by Harper Lee's privacy and control of the book's reception. Harper Lee allowed for the book to go into film production six weeks after its release, but it only added to her need to control how the book was used. She had a strong tie to Gregory Peck who took on the role of Atticus, and in her opinion, no one else could do the part justice following his performance. What changed her mind about allowing the stage play to be made is not entirely clear, but it is believed that it is due to her allowing its use for school systems. Her wishes have not remained law on *Mockingbird* as it is currently in production to be adapted by Aaron Sorkin and performed on Broadway. Since the release of the stage play, people have flocked to

Maycomb, Alabama to see the annual performances of the novel and enjoy the town's connection to the novel. This nostalgic pull to the novel continues in social media where *Mockingbird* posts are shared sentimentally with notes about some image being their favorite scene, making note of its physical or implied reference in other shows and books, or sharing a quote because they liked it. With the presence of the book on the internet, many fans have tried to remain loyal to how they interpret Lee's wishes for the novel's use as well as *Go Set a Watchman*'s publication. Fanfiction writers both prior to and following *Watchman* continuously explore the relationship between Atticus and his late wife as well as adding to the father / daughter relationship he shared with Scout. *Mockingbird* will undoubtedly see change over time, but the full effect adaptation has on the source text is limited to where readers will go with it within their respective creative communities' rules. With the film, the story had to be restructured to deal with time constraints but Lee was involved with set design and the casting of Atticus. In internet communities, while protecting Lee and *Mockingbird* is important, writers also regularly build onto the story and will note if they have been influenced by *Watchman.* Adaptation keeps the excitement for the novel alive, be it through new readers expressing their gratitude and sharing it with others, or experienced readers seeking to revel in the history they share with the novel. Adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is entirely dependent on its audience to continually mold it to fit to the environment it is used in with respect to the source text and writer.

Despite the warm, sentimental feelings toward *Mockingbird* as it has aged, it has not aged without controversy. When *Go Set a Watchman* was released in 2015,

fifty-five years after *Mockingbird,* audiences everywhere were alarmed in good and bad ways about its publication. There is not and likely never will be certain proof that Lee wanted to publish *Watchman* due to skepticism about the role her lawyer and power of attorney, Tonja Carter, played in the books release. While she did pass the state of Alabama's inquiries on her mental well-being, those in her inner circle knew it did not paint the whole picture of her mental status. J.B. Lippincott, *Mockingbird's* initial publisher, noted *Go Set a Watchman* as the first book Lee wrote. In later correspondence, there was hope that the novel would be part of a trilogy, but existence of a connecting book between *Mockingbird* and *Watchman* has yet to be proven to exist. Details regarding Lee's plans for future writing remain unknown

Marred by the drama that unfolded after its release in 2015, *Go Set a Watchman* will never reach the same heights as its counterpart. There is not, and likely never will be, any real proof of Harper Lee's wishes for the text available to the public. Because of the shaky circumstances surrounding the 2015 release, any proof of plans for *Watchman* will be hard to accept due to the rumor mill, the questionable acts of the lawyer Tonja Carter's, and her control over Lee's estate. To find an exact point in time where Lee actually said she did not wish to publish another book is hard to come by, as many articles discussing Lee and publication depend on statements by Lee's acquaintances, rather than Lee herself. Interpretation of *Go Set a Watchman* is now in the hands of an audience who is either unconcerned with the issues surrounding the text or curious about the text because of the issues surrounding it.

In the fifty-five plus years since the release of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* the book has been carried across many cultures and developed a presence in the public eye whether people wanted to read it or not. Harper Lee notably gave only four interviews about her writing or life, despite having multiple offers to be interviewed in whatever way she chose. But she chose to control the public's view of her and left *Mockingbird* to exist on its own amongst readers. This privacy was something many fans respected, and only the bravest attempted to get into her inner circle for an interview that would never happen. Otherwise, respect involved leaving *Mockingbird* alone and working with what Harper Lee had provided to her audience. Adaptations were made but the true intention of Lee's text teaching a lesson and telling a story remains intact.

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